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XAYMACA - for Lorne Macdonald

Ian Adam

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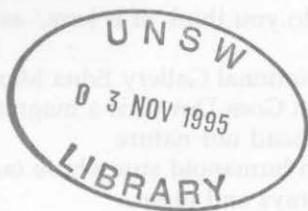
Abstract

My wife is in the photograph, the ship is steaming away to the right of her shoulder, heading towards the horizon as she poses in the warm Caribbean sea.

Ian Adam

XAYMACA

– for Lorne Macdonald



The slave ship called at Ocho Rios.

My wife is in the photograph, the ship
is steaming away to the right of her shoulder,
heading towards the horizon
as she poses in the warm Caribbean sea.

Behind me as I snap the picture
Dunn's River waterfall,
jammed with people
climbing the ledges up its 600 feet,
holding hands in chains.

'What did you think of Jamaica,' asked Linda Cameron.

The ship was enormous in the harbour
a hotel containing the vacationers
whose vacation was the ship.
It squatted, the ship.
It was an angel
food cake. Layered
with stories. It crushed the harbour
sweetly. Inside were the rituals
of captivity.

In Ocho Rios the human chains
climbing the waterfall,
in the town market
chains of those
too poor to ever leave the island
selling to cruise ship vacationers,
captive of the tour.

The tourists see those living off tourism,
the locals see the tourists.

It's all authentic.

'What do you think of it here,' asked Claire Harris.

In the National Gallery Edna Manley's
'The Sun Goes Down' is a magnificence
neither head nor nature
a brown humanoid sun whose face
is both rays and night,
ours
and not ours,

strong as Henry Moore or Giacometti
but too female, too Jamaican,
for fame.

A mobile also there, unauthored,
grit dirt floor cig-buffed littered
leads counter-clockwise
through corrugated iron panel walls
covered with torn posters
and graffiti
(lie down girl me stick it in')
to a dead body
and cast-off bottles lying in rubbish:
a vicious spiral,

anonymous, Jamaican, unrecognized.

Thirty percent of Kingston population
is squatters.

A sign in shanty town reads
'MAN WHO STEAL HERE, HIM GET HEAD CHOP OFF.'

'Don't you always see me laughing?'
said Eduardo the Kingston driver,
as we planned the excursion to Ocho Rios.

he gave jolly comments
on points of interest
all along the way.

The sugar cane grew
thick, fibrous, higher than men.
It was harvested by slaves

captive to a money chain.
It crushed the harbour with sweetness.
It was a vicious circle.

Matthew 'Monk' Lewis
author and slave-owner
wrote a story about Jamaica,
'The Isle of Devils.' The devils
are not plantation owners,
but blacks. His blacks. His story
multi-layered
dark sugar.

He dies of yellow fever
en route to England.
Buried at sea
his body does not sink,
is last seen
floating back to Jamaica. Lewis
circles back
to the Ocho Rios ship.
His story
sugar, white-layered.

Eduardo had smoked ganga at Ocho,
I could see it in his eyes,
he drove silently and viciously back to the hotel.